



**Promoting Britain's
Railway
for Passengers
and Freight**

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23rd October 2015

Dear Sir,

Response to Crosscountry Direct Award Consultation

Railfuture is the UK's leading independent organisation campaigning for better services for passengers and freight. A voluntary organisation to which many rail user groups are affiliated, the organisation is independent both politically and commercially.

This response is made by the Passenger Group, Railfuture, part of the Policy Directorate. The comments made are not confidential, and we would be happy for them to appear on your website and you are welcome to use them in discussion with funders and other stakeholders. We would be happy to enlarge on any of the points made above or to work with you to identify the best options for the future.

A. Level of involvement the existing Cross Country franchise

Railfuture is the foremost campaigning organisation for the development of railway services in Great Britain. It is composed entirely of volunteers with an interest in railway development, with about 3000 members nationwide, organised into geographical branches throughout England, Scotland and Wales. It has established a formal network of officers responsible for liaison with Train Operating Companies, especially, in this context, with Cross Country Trains. In the last 12 month, our Cross Country Trains Liaison Officer has discussed timetabling, rolling stock issues and reservations with their Communications Director.

This consultation response has been developed by our Cross Country Trains Liaison Officer in consultation with all relevant branches of Railfuture and with other Train Operating Company Liaison Officers.

Representatives of Railfuture would very much like to meet members of the Cross Country Direct Award Team to discuss these aspirations.

B. Things we would like the current franchise to continue to do

As a minimum, we wish to see the present service and stopping patterns maintained. Namely:-

- 1) Hourly Plymouth - Birmingham - Leeds – Edinburgh and vice versa, with some starting/terminating at Penzance in the South West and some starting/terminating at Dundee or Aberdeen.
- 2) Hourly Bristol – Birmingham – Manchester and vice versa, with some starting/terminating at Paignton, Plymouth or Exeter. *(With B1 this provides a half-hourly service between Bristol and Birmingham.)*

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- 3) Hourly Bournemouth – Birmingham – Manchester and vice versa.
(With B2 this provides a half-hourly service between Birmingham and Manchester.)
- 4) Hourly Reading – Birmingham – Newcastle and vice versa (but see C.7a/b/c below). *(With B3 this provides a half-hourly service between Reading and Birmingham, with B1 a half-hourly service between Birmingham and Sheffield.)*
- 5) Hourly Cardiff – Birmingham – Nottingham and vice versa.
- 6) Hourly Birmingham – Stansted Airport and vice versa, with additional short journeys in the early morning and late evening at the eastern end of this route.

We have omitted deliberately from the list above the additional Birmingham/ Nottingham and Birmingham/Leicester services which, whilst they are very important for local travel we do not see as fitting the Cross Country Services framework, being essentially local inter-urban as opposed to inter-city services. We think both services should be assigned to a future West Midlands Rail franchise or equivalent.

We wish Cross Country Trains to retain their off-peak first class returns and advance first class single fares but reduce the differential between first and standard class to 50% (*The present differential for off-peak returns between Birmingham and Newcastle is 250%, that for advance singles from Birmingham to York is more than 500%!*)

We also wish to see the present Cross Country Trains on-board customer services maintained and developed, especially the hot meals service introduced this year, and including the XC Trains web-sites for computers and mobile telephones. However we have continuing concerns about the 'On-The-Day Reservations' process which, whilst we can understand the rationale for its introduction, we believe adds a level of complication to seat allocation that most passengers do not appreciate (see C14 and C15 below for clarification and desired improvements).

C. Changes to the current franchise service provision

Note: *In the rest of this document we use the term 'core Cross Country services' or 'core services' as shorthand for the following inter-city passenger services:*

- *Manchester to/from Bristol and the South West*
- *Manchester to/from Bournemouth*
- *Glasgow/Edinburgh to/from Plymouth & Penzance*
- *Newcastle to/from Reading & Southampton/South Coast*

The remaining services may be referred to as 'non-core'. This does not imply in any way that they are of purely secondary importance. The discrimination is more about the stopping patterns and/or type of rolling stock used for each.

Rolling Stock Improvements

- 1) Overcrowding throughout the day, including at weekends, is regarded as the most serious issue affecting Cross Country services, both on its core and non-core routes. Even 'only full' trains produces an unsatisfactory ambience for longer distance travellers. Furthermore Voyagers used on core service are not regarded as particularly comfortable trains for longer journeys, being rather cramped and with little space for heavy luggage. None of XC Trains rolling stock has inadequate space for bicycles.
- 2) Therefore Cross Country Trains should actively pursue options for strengthening their fleet of rolling stock to mitigate these deficiencies.
- 3) Taking note of the facts that a significant proportion of core XC services operate diesel-powered on electrified routes, and there are few if any suitable diesel-powered rolling stock vehicles available, we recommend that Cross Country Trains initiate acquisition of a fleet of bi-mode electro-diesel trains. This would release Voyagers to strengthen non-core XC Services and services of other Train Operating Companies.
- 4) An alternative, but sub-optimum, approach to providing bi-mode power and extra capacity would be to add pantograph cars and additional un-powered carriages to existing Voyager trains. However this approach suffers from two problems:-

- a) The Voyager train sets are already 14-15 years old and not expected to have more than another 10-15 years active life;
 - b) Adding carriages to existing trains whilst providing the desired extra seating capacity would not release any trains for additional services.
- 5) In inter-city rolling stock, the passenger environment should be improved by:-
- a) providing many more 4 seat bays with tables, preferably with folding sections to allow easier access;
 - b) increasing airline-style seat spacing to 29" or more;
 - c) aligning all seats with the windows to provide unimpeded views;
 - d) providing extra space for bulky luggage.
- 6) In non-core services rolling stock, the Cross Country 170s should be modified such that seat spacing is at least the ATOC recommended figure of 27".

Timetable Enhancements

- 7) **We wish to see the following changes made to the Cross Country service provision:-**
- a) An additional train per hour between Birmingham, Derby, Sheffield, Wakefield and Leeds.
 - b) Eliminate duplication of services between York and Newcastle, but without loss of the faster Midlands to the North East journey times provided by the present Reading/Newcastle service (*at present the Plymouth to/from Edinburgh and Reading to/from Newcastle services operate, in both directions, only some ten minutes apart*).
 - c) Re-introduce regular direct trains between Swansea, Cardiff, Gloucester and the North East of England. From Cardiff these should be at least two-hourly frequency.
 - d) Supplement the existing FGW service stopping at Ashchurch to provide a more frequent service between Gloucester, Cheltenham and Ashchurch.
 - e) Add direct services between Ashchurch and Birmingham.
 - f) Provide direct long distance services (or more where any exist at present) at Bridgwater and Weston-Super-Mare to enhance connections between these towns and the wider network.
 - g) Provide more fast services direct from Gloucester to Bristol and the South West
- 8) A new station is expected to open at Worcestershire Parkway before 2019 on the SW-NE corridor. When this occurs a significant proportion of Cross Country trains should call there to provide, at least, an hourly service in each direction to Bristol and Birmingham, and travel opportunities to a variety of more distant destinations.
- 9) In addition, a new station will open at Bromsgrove before 2019 on the same corridor. When this becomes operational a selection of long distance services, particularly southbound in the morning and northbound in the evening, should call there to provide direct links to major cities on the core Cross Country network.
- 10) A regular all-stations service should be introduced between Newport and Gloucester with good connections at both ends, both on weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays. However we do not believe this should be part of the Cross Country Trains franchise as it fits better with Arriva Trains Wales.
- 11) Earlier Sunday services should be added to the Stansted Airport/Birmingham route, especially between Cambridge and Peterborough. Timings should allow timely connections with the East Coast main line trains to/from the North.
- 12) The 2127 and 2227 departures from Stansted Airport should be extended as far as Peterborough and either stabled overnight there or return in-service to Cambridge. The latter course would also provide better late evening connections from the East Coast Main Line.
- 13) A very early service from Birmingham to Stansted Airport should be introduced to arrive in time for passengers to check-in for flights departing from 0700. This could run non-stop from Leicester to Peterborough and form the present 0444 from Cambridge.

Fares

- 14) Standard class off-peak fares on Cross Country Trains services are amongst the most expensive, in terms of pence per mile, in Great Britain. **Therefore** we urge Cross Country Trains to bring their off-peak return fares more into line with comparable journeys by other operating companies.

- 15) Cross Country Trains only offers fares designated as 'day returns' where there is a competing operating company. Therefore day return fares should be made available for all journeys that can be reasonably completed out-and-back in a day (*for instance, where a return journey plus a significant amount of time at the destination - say, 3 hours - is possible*).

Seat Reservations On The Day

- 16) We have continuing concerns about the risk that existing seated passengers, possibly elderly, may be forced to give up their seats en route and the consequent confusion and ill-will generated, particularly if the service concerned is already full and there are no more seats readily available. We appreciate the efforts made by Cross Country Trains to limit the seats into which either Reservations-on-the-Day or Advance-Purchases-on-the-Day can be made and also the policy of physical labels above the affected seats to inform passengers of the risk of them being asked to move. However on-board communications are inconsistent, especially where station stops are close together and the current seat information screens are too small and poorly located to advise a seated passenger of a change to that seat's reservation status.
- 17) Therefore, the following changes should be implemented:-
- The seat reservation displays should be re-positioned and re-sized so that a passenger can be alerted to any change in that seat's reservation status;
 - It should be easy for a newly boarded passenger(s) to reserve the seat(s) that they have occupied, either using telephones or computers, or via the train staff;
 - Train managers should have sufficient support to advise passengers after each stop as to where seats may become reserved en-route.

On-board Facilities

- 18) Quiet coaches should be re-introduced on all services.
- 19) Refreshment trolley services should be made available for longer on evening trains. They should be re-instated on journeys north of Edinburgh.
- 20) The problem of toilet smell for passengers sitting or standing nearby has still not been resolved.

Miscellaneous

- 21) Maintain and improve the ability to use diversionary routes in the event of planned and unplanned disruption. Work closely with other operators so that disruption handling is more seamless for the passenger.
- 22) A single all-lines printed timetable booklet should replace the present set and should include viable connections to major centres not on the Cross Country network.
- 23) Regular meetings with groups of stakeholders should be re-instated. Consideration should be given to providing Day Pass/Rail Warrants to stakeholder when attending these meetings.

The Railfuture ToC Liaison for the Crosscountry franchise is Steve Wright and he has compiled this response on behalf of the organisation mail : steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk

Yours faithfully,



Chris Fribbins
Railfuture
Head of Passenger Group